

Sermon Sunday 19 August 2018 - Cease striving and surrender to God
Rory Birkbeck

It's easy in our busy, rushed lives to be doing God's work, but yet to completely tune Him out. That is why I love nature. I love getting into the bush, in the quiet, in the stillness, away from the crowds, just me and God.

Last week I went into the bush with friends, away from home comforts. I'm not much of a poet but I wrote this little piece about my own internal struggle last week.

[Slide 1]

To escape oh what a calamity, what tragedy might take hold?
To surrender my plan, to your plan, to realise you've always got the best for me
I hear the rush of the waters, the blowing of the breeze
In peaceful surrender, I retreat to my knees
A place of worship like no-other
A place I've always longed to be
Surrendered to your name

I wrote this about my tendency to worry unnecessarily about work. Even in the midst of nature last weekend, out of cell tower coverage, I had the most amazing two days of being still before God, but still my mind would sometimes ponder on tasks I might have missed, and I would have to remind myself to relax in God.

So in preparation for this message, I really wanted this message to change me first, It did. The Bible has a lot to say about striving, rushing, hurry and worry, perhaps one of its more vivid expressions is in Psalm 46, our focus today.

Pray: "Holy Spirit, we're not so good at relaxing... yet, but we know that You are brilliant at it. We are so grateful that You love being our Helper, until Your nature in us becomes our everyday reality. Thank You that You are our promise of peace and our place of stillness.

[Slide 2]

The strategy of Psalm 46 is to name the very real reasons there are for fear and worry, and then to confess trust in God in the *midst of those fears*.

I take comfort that I'm not the only one that worries and strives, One of the great men, reformer, Martin Luther wrote a paraphrased version of Psalm 46, called "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." In time of trouble he would say to his companions, let's play sing Psalm 46 and "let the devil do his worst".

Psalm 46 is a song, it has three, three-verse stanzas. Each stanza ends with the word "Selah", which is of uncertain meaning, but some believe it means to pause and reflect on the greatness

of thought. So at the end of each stanza, we are going to pause and reflect, have some quiet time confessing our trust in God in the midst our own circumstances and fears.

- 1 **[Slide 3]** God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
- 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
- 3 though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging. (Pause and reflect) **[Black out 30 secs]**
- 4 **[Slide 4]** There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.
- 5 God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.
- 6 Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.
- 7 The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. (Pause and reflect) **[Black out 30 secs]**
- 8 **[Slide 5]** Come and see what the Lord has done,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.
- 9 He makes wars cease
to the ends of the earth.
He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields[d] with fire.
- 10 *He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."*
- 11 The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. (Selah) **[Black out 30 secs]**

[Slide 6]

Specifically today we are looking at Psalm 46:10 - "Be still and know I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

The words "Be still" in the the famous verse Psalm 46:10, means to cease striving, to relax, to let go, to rely on God. "Be still and know I am God" is a call to surrender our striving, to lay down our weapons. We do not need to strive in battle because God is with us. He fights all our battles the prophet Isaiah tells us. *Psalm 46:10 teaches us God is in control, we are accountable to Him.*

[Slide 7]

Here are three recent stories from my life where I've had some breakthroughs in ceasing to strive. This was through reading God's truth, prayer and quiet time with God.

Cease striving by reading God's truth

[Slide 8]

One of the ways we can learn to cease striving is by reading God's truth.

Psalm 46 is a song that was written to celebrate a remarkable victory for God's people. When great victories happened, songs were written to commemorate such occasions, to remind them not to forget what God had done.

During the time of preparing this message I went through times of great trial at work, but in reading about King Hezekiah and his leadership, I was challenged to surrender those thoughts to God. Some Scholars believe the great victory spoken of in Psalm 46 was the Assyrian invasion by King Sennacherib during the reign of King Hezekiah. You can read it in Isaiah 36-39, 2 Kings 18-20, 2 Chronicles 29-32, and Micah 1:10-16

It can be so tempting to read this story as a great victory for God, but at the same time it would have been a fearful moment in King Hezekiah's life.

[Slide 9]

Despite how he felt at the time he told his people, 2 Chronicles 32:7 "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. 8 With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles." And the people gained confidence from what Hezekiah the king of Judah said."

King Hezekiah and his army at any point could have given in to fear and decided let's try and do this in our own strength. Sometimes it can be so tempting to just say 'I'll work a bit harder I don't think God's got this one'.

[Slide 10]

But King Hezekiah had given the burden over to God, and in 2 Chronicles 32:20-21 it says "King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz cried out in prayer to heaven about this. And the Lord sent an angel, who annihilated all the fighting men and the commanders and officers in the camp of the Assyrian king. So he withdrew to his own land in disgrace. And when he went into the temple of his god, some of his sons, his own flesh and blood, cut him down with the sword.

If you were King Hezekiah what would you have done? Kings before him tried to put their trust in other stronger nations like Egypt to defend Judah, but they all learnt the only sure foundation is God. In the midst of a crisis, we must remember that in the contrast to God's strength, our problems, are small.

Cease striving by spending time in prayer

[Slide 11]

Another way I've found to help me cease striving is prayer.

When Matt became unwell, I was pretty cut up, as all of us were. So I would go into his office and pray (sometimes Declan would join me). One day when I was in there I picked up a book from his desk. It was a book titled 'Heaven', written by Randy Alcorn. It immediately gave me comfort in my prayer time so I kept reading it. For those of you who don't know the book. It points back to biblical truths about Heaven in the bible. By asking questions like: Is heaven going to be completely different from earth? What will we do for eternity? Will there be animals and sports and food in Heaven?

Anyway great book. When Matt became well I asked if he'd read it, and he said it was on his 'to read' pile and a couple of people from OBC already recommended to him. So I also encouraged him to read it, but the next time, we caught up he told me he didn't get a chance to read the book, because Roxy picked it up, and became so excited she passed it onto her Dad, Chris

Last week when I asked Matt if I could share this story. He told me with a tear in his eye, that after reading pages in the book, Chris was excitedly sharing what Heaven would be with people in his church, Whiritoa Bible Chapel.

Chris passed away a couple of days ago, and I want to honour his memory. I hope that when my time comes I will be remembered as a loved husband, adored father and father in law and passionate Grandpa/Oupa- as he is.

Here's a quote from the book that puts everything into perspective:

[Slide 12]

"Meanwhile, we on this dying Earth can relax and rejoice for our loved ones who are in the presence of Christ. As the apostle Paul tells us, though we naturally grieve at losing loved ones, we are not "to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Our parting is not the end of our relationship, only an interruption. We have not "lost" them, because we know where they are. They are experiencing the joy of Christ's presence in a place so wonderful that Christ called it Paradise. And one day, we're told, in a magnificent reunion, they and we "will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18)." — [Randy Alcorn, Heaven](#)

Psalm 46 helps us to look at the bigger picture and see beyond ourselves, to "the holy place where the Most High dwells", not to our temporary existence on earth, but a place where all striving will cease, and we won't be lonely, afraid or hurt ever again.

Cease striving by having quiet time with Him

[Slide 13]

One Friday a couple of weeks ago, I was in my office overwhelmed by the amount of work I had to do, when I heard down the music down the corridor. This isn't surprising in our office as I work opposite Cool Bananas in the Lifezone building. But on this particular day it was beautiful worship music. It turned out that the youth group was setting up for an all weekend youth camp. So in the midst of them setting up, I felt to just come and have some quiet time with Jesus. After a while the youth pastor, Scott, came and said "I'm coming to join the party" and he had his quiet time too.

Why is it so hard to have a quiet time?

Robert Boyd Munger, Presbyterian minister and Author wrote a timeless book in 1951, imagining what it would be like to have Jesus come to the home of our hearts. He moves room by room considering what Christ desires for us. The book is titled My Heart-Christ's Home.

[Slide 14]

He talks about a quiet time with Jesus being in the living room of his heart. Imagine a cozy living room with a fireplace, comfy couch, nice chairs, an intimate, secluded, quiet atmosphere. Warmed by time spent with Jesus.

As their time together progresses, he's starts having trouble keeping to his quiet time schedule.

[Slide 15]

Jesus responds, "The trouble is that you have been thinking of this quiet time, of Bible study and prayer, as a means for your own spiritual growth. This is true, but you have forgotten that this time means something to me also. Remember, I love you. At a great cost I redeemed you. I value your fellowship. Just having you look up into my face warms my heart. Don't neglect this hour if only for my sake. Whether or not you want to be with me, remember I want to be with you. I really love you!!"

[Slide 16]

Robert goes on to say: "You know, the truth that Christ wants my fellowship, and He loves me, wants me to be with him and waits for me, has done more to transform my quiet time with God than any other single fact. "

God is all powerful, He doesn't need us to help him achieve anything, the most important thing he wants is to have a relationship with us. God doesn't need us, He wants us.

A quiet time with God can look differently for each of us. There is no exact formula or routine, I heard of one solo mum who didn't get space away from her kids and her quiet time would consist of her pulling a sheet over her head for a couple of minutes a day.

Being in God's presence, in the quiet and stillness, does help us cease striving. It helps us to see what's important, which is our relationship with Him.

He loves us, wants us, waits for us - let's spend time with Him.

[Slide 17]

Here are some questions to help you recognise His presence.

Did I feel touched or moved by God at anytime today through an incident, a book, a person, art, music, nature, a letter etc.

1. What caused me to turn to Jesus? A fear, misunderstanding, temptation, suffering, joy.
2. Did God's Word become real to me today? In prayer, Bible reading, in an incident, etc.
3. Did God cause me to move from -
 - a. Excessive self-confidence to greater trust in Him
 - b. My plans and desires to His plans
 - c. Low self-esteem to a greater acceptance of myself
4. **[Slide 18]**Have I been challenged to reach out beyond myself
 - a. To the lonely, to those who are oppressed and disadvantaged, to those who give me a hard time, to express love, to encourage, to share Jesus with someone
5. Was there some word, action or attitude that I felt grieved the Lord today? Do I need to ask forgiveness
6. What has happened today that I should be thankful to God for
7. How do I look forward to the future? Am I discouraged, fearful, anxious, hopeful, excited? If so why?
8. Is there some area in life I sense God calling me to change?

If you are looking for a living room to come to during the week, and just spend time with Jesus. I'd invite you to come to our prayer corner, maybe light a candle or use one of the many other creative ways to spend time in the Father's presence.

Regardless of what location you chose, just don't let Christ wait alone in the living room of your heart, but every day find a time and place when, with the Word of God and in prayer, you may be together with him.

Do this, and you will remember regardless of what trouble you find yourself in, the help of God is greater than any crisis - big or small. God is always with us.

ENDS